



# Westmorland Red Squirrels



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## Annual Review 2019



Geoff Hetherington, Chairman

Looking back over an eventful 2019, there has been so many people for me to thank— your contributions have

been very much appreciated. The start of the 5-year Grizedale (G2G) project in partnership with the National Trust and Red Squirrels Northern England was a significant highlight of 2019.

Elsewhere our various communities have shown what can be achieved with local knowledge, co-operation and determination.

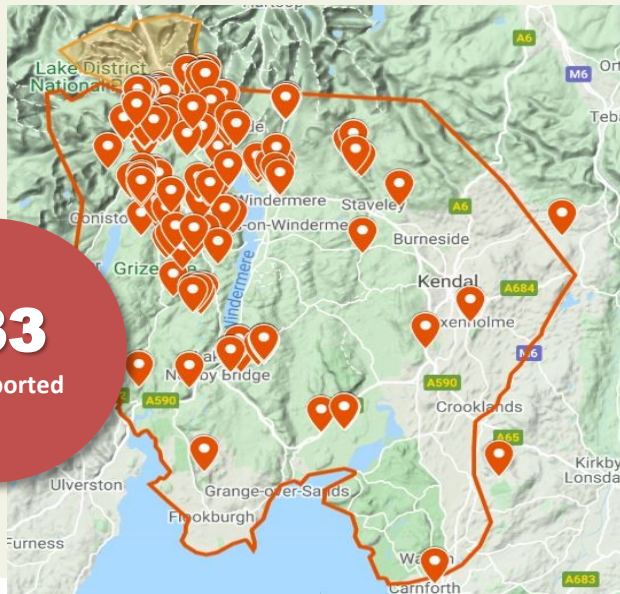
But if we are to do more than just 'hold the line' for the red squirrels we

are lucky enough to have in our area, we need concerted action on a truly landscape scale to prevent recolonising from 'next-door' when a woodland has been cleared of grey squirrels. Success for this strategy across our area will ultimately depend on the active involvement and commitment from our large landowners. Migrating grey squirrels can travel long distances and quickly pose a threat to red populations, even those some miles away.

*Making the future safe for our red squirrels*

# 2019 in a nutshell

## Squirrels



**333**

reds reported



**4628**

greys caught

## Events, meetings and publicity



We had a stand at

**14**

local events

We attended

**15 meetings**

**6 internal meetings**

including trustees and management team meetings, and area steering group meetings

**4 external meetings**

including one with Northern Red Squirrels Cumbria and two of the South Cumbria Squirrel Management Forum

**1 conference**

Red Squirrels United conference in Southport

**4 media interviews**

with BBC Radio Cumbria and the Westmorland Gazette

**8 talks**

given to community groups



700 followers on twitter



331 subscribers to our E-News



1,465 likes on Facebook



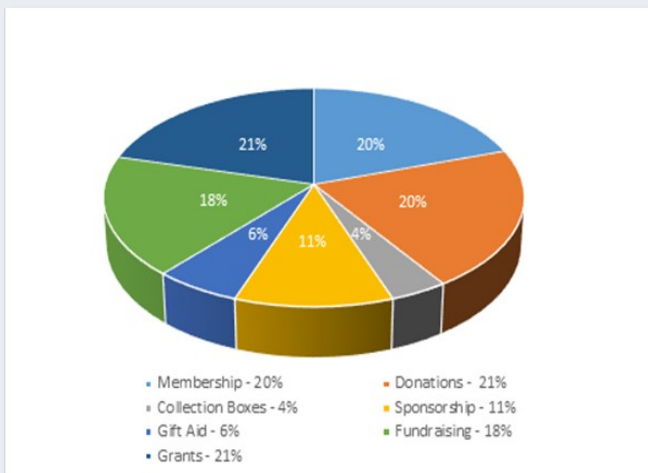
## Members at the end of 2019

**343** members

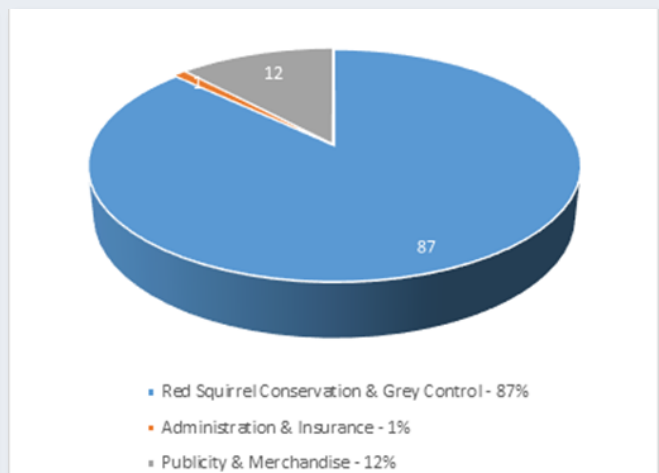


## Financials for the 2019 calendar year

### Income



### Expenditure



Our most recently published accounts for the financial year 2018/19 show income as £51,318 and expenditure as £44,577

## Some of our 2019 reds



## Ambleside and Langdale

The efforts from sponsors and volunteers continued at pace in this area.

At Skelwith Fold Caravan Park scores of Scots pines were planted which are much loved by red squirrels –



and provide habitats for pine martens, the deadly enemy of grey squirrels.

We previously reported a potential Squirrel Pox case at Skelwith Bridge thankfully the Vet confirmed it was not SQPV - that could have been such a problem as there are so many reds in the area.

Delighted to report the reds are thriving at the Samling Hotel and surrounding woods.

The last year has been an unusual one in this area – very few greys have been trapped, our coordinator in the area even went 5 months without trapping anything, there were greys around but just would not go in to the traps. This may well be due to the abundance of food so readily available – it was a really good year for beech mast and hazel especially so they did not need to investigate traps. On the other hand the shooters have been doing a great job, they have really proved the benefit of the thermal imaging equipment and have had a good deal of success - the gear is expensive but definitely proving its worth.

### Wanted!

Ed Watson has been making all our test and trap feeders for years and is looking for someone to take over from him - he has got feeder making down to a fine art and has done a wonderful job and is very willing to show any future candidate the benefits of all he has learned over

the years. We need someone just to attach mesh to 2 jam jar lids - one lid is hard wired to the mesh and becomes the base and the other is detachable and is the lid – we used to use bird feeders but the squirrels are so destructive and the bird feeders expensive so we make our own . It would be great if whoever takes on the job is a supporter of our cause rather than a trapper who is subject to being called out at any time but anyone offering help would be very much appreciated.

### Troutbeck

The number of grey squirrels culled in 2019 is slightly up on 2018 , 97 compared to 93.

Happy to report that the reds are still hanging on but they haven't spread through the valley in the same way they did a few years ago. They are at the top and the bottom of the



valley however. Good to also report that we are receiving a lot of support from locals and visitors particularly at our village stall, so many thanks to our contributors and buyers!

### Windermere

For the last 7 years, we have been controlling greys in St Catherine's and Elleray Wood (Orrest Head). As a result the first red was seen 3 years ago. Since then there have been fairly regular sightings of single reds near the National Trust Building in St Catherine's Wood and Elleray Wood, also along the path linking the two woods. We are not sure how many reds there are now but think there are at least 3 or 4, judging by their size and colour.

This might not sound much but it is obvious that this environment suits them and we are hopeful that this year they will be able to breed and become a more common sight.

Elsewhere, we continue to control grey squirrels in other woods and locations in the area. We have been greatly encouraged by the increasing number of householders willing to get involved by allowing us to site a trap in their garden and also the increasing numbers of local hotels who support us, all of whom want to see a return of red squirrels to the area.

John and Wendy Phillips are relinquishing their long held role of coordinator for Windermere and Bowness. We are indebted to them for all their help and encouragement. Thankfully they are continuing to control the greys in the woodland around their home and hope their years of volunteering is finally rewarded by the return of reds to Rayrigg Woods and Sheriffs Walk.

Finally, we are always on the lookout for volunteers to help us, this could be just for a few hours a week, dropping off traps to houses, topping up feeders in woods, making squirrel feeders or even making items or growing plants to sell at our stall in Troutbeck. If you have a skill or enjoy being outdoors, we want to hear from you!



## AGM

Our well-attended AGM heard our guest speaker, Craig Shuttleworth from Red Squirrel Trust Wales, focus on the potential for red squirrel reintroductions. If we are to save our native red squirrels, he argued, there would be times when we might need to reintroduce and reinforce existing remaining populations. Previous programmes have not always succeeded. Recently, Craig has helped the UK Squirrel Accord develop a Protocol for red squirrel captive breeding, public enclosures and release programmes in the UK.

All officers and trustees were re-appointed.



## Central Area

We are still seeing reds regularly in Kentmere, although not in such high numbers since the felling at HP plantation. Sadly, there are still no reports of reds returning to Longsleddale. Further south, and despite substantial efforts to control

greys around Sizergh and Brigsteer, red sightings have not been as frequent as in previous years. A red was spotted on the roadside at Low Sizergh Barn but unfortunately it had been killed. We are going to need to look at strategies to prevent greys from occupying previously controlled areas as they seem to be using routes

along the river both from the south and from Kendal itself.

We have an additional contractor to cover the area to the north of the River Kent from Staveley through to Burneside including Craggy Wood. This will enable one of our other contractors to concentrate on the area to the South of Staveley.

## Red Squirrel Rescue

In August we mentioned the exciting news that, thanks to a partnership between Westmorland Red Squirrels, the National Trust, the Grasmere Red Squirrel Group and Red Squirrels Northern England (RSNE), we had secured five years of funding to intensify squirrel management between Grasmere and Grizedale. Building on the invaluable work of colleagues to protect red squirrels in Grasmere, and evidence from our Rusland Reds project of red squirrel presence to the south of Grizedale, RSNE had moved quickly to appoint Jack Edmondson as a red squirrel ranger.

Jack has been focusing on the Tarn Hows area. Not only do reds have grey competitors in the area, but also a large portion of the woodland is being felled due to an outbreak of *Phytophthora ramorum*, a pathogen that affects larch.

Jack also worked with other staff and volunteers to set up extensive trail camera monitoring of sites, which has helped to locate woodlands with both reds and greys. We will be working closely with RSNE in 2020 to encourage more local people to accomplish our objectives.

## Witherslack & Grange

2019 season was pretty good for the reds in our area with the exception of a few suspected cases of Squirrel Pox early in the year around Chapel House plantation at Staveley in Cartmel, and possibly Cartmel Fell. We don't believe it spread

throughout the population, the numbers still appear to be good.

We had several juveniles in Chapel House as well as a small population observed at Witherslack on trail cameras in August. We hope to enable the reds to spread beyond Cartmel Fell during 2020, we have been working towards this over the

last few years by keeping greys to low numbers and having monitored feeding stations on the edge of the forest as well as neighbouring land we have been successful to a small extent already.

Grange needs a lot of work this year as the greys are still in quite high numbers in most of the woodlands.

## Fundraising

We rely greatly on the generosity of members, sponsors and donors to support the work we do to deliver red squirrel conservation. Whether you popped a few coins in one of our collection boxes or signed up for life membership, we thank you all. Then there were those events such as the Silverdale coffee morning, talks to many community groups, and the fundraiser at the Hare and Hounds in Levens, that all helped to swell the coffers.



Sales of knitting patterns, Troutbeck plant stall, and new for this year - the sale of reindeer figures – raised over £700!

Particular thanks go to all our Patrons and Corporate Sponsors who gave their support in 2019:

### Patrons

- Ian Gregg
- Skelwith Fold Caravan Park

### Gold Sponsors

- Holgates Caravan Parks,
- Logs Direct
- Linthwaite House Hotel  
Windermere

### Silver Sponsors

- Langdale Leisure, Elterwater
- Cedar Manor Hotel,  
Windermere

### Bronze Sponsors

- Lindeth Howe Hotel,  
Windermere
- WCF Pets and Equestrian,  
Kendal

We also benefitted from specific grants to support our project work:

### Rusland's Reds

- Graythwaite Estate
- Lake District National Park  
Authority
- Forestry Commission
- John Strutt Conservation Trust
- National Lottery Heritage Fund

### Arnside and Silverdale

- Barnes Conservation Trust
- Arnside and Silverdale AONB
- Landscape Trust

### Grasmere to Grizedale (G2G)

- National Trust
- Red Squirrels Northern England

## Northern Red Squirrels

Is an umbrella group that has been created to unite all independent voluntary groups and individuals who are working to help save our red squirrels from extinction in the North of England. It is a 'network of voluntary action' that shares news, ideas and best practice. Each member group remains completely independent to allow it to address issues within its own area in the most appropriate way. There are now 14 red squirrel groups working hard in Cumbria.

## UK Squirrel Accord

The UK Squirrel Accord is a UK-wide partnership of 37 leading conservation and forestry organisations.

Last year we mentioned the Grey Squirrel Fertility Control Project.

So far, results from the Animal Plant Health Agency show that an oral contraceptive was effective in reducing reproduction in rats. APHA will move to testing the contraceptive for effectiveness on grey squirrels.

Tests to deliver the contraceptive to grey squirrels only are going well. Rhodamine B is used as a marker. It is consumed as part of the bait and is incorporated into the animal's hair. This causes the hair to fluoresce under UV light and identifies squirrels that have ingested the bait.

Further work will now be done to assess the amount of bait eaten per visit, monitor bait uptake in areas with different squirrel densities and refine the bait uptake by non-target species.

Defra is complementing this research by creating a model to predict grey squirrel densities in woodlands to guide management efforts.



## Rusland

In March, the National Heritage Lottery Funded Rusland Horizons scheme came to an end. Our part of the scheme, the Rusland's Reds project, started in January 2016, led throughout by Bob Cartwright, our Deputy Chair. The various reviews, internal and external concluded that it was a success. Now, because of its achievements, Westmorland Red Squirrels will continue the project, still under the Rusland's Reds brand, with support from the Rusland Horizons Trust – another legacy of the scheme.

On the ground, we had a successful trapping season and were able to use sighting reports to target known areas of greys. The only large-scale estate control was by the Graythwaite Estate. There was regular shooting of greys, but as these are not always reported, we believe that the cull numbers are likely to be higher. Reporting of reds continued to be low, but most encouragingly we now believe that there is evidence of a small number of locations where there are resident red populations. In 2020, we intend to use this knowledge to target our trapping work. We will also look to support the G2G project (reported elsewhere) in strengthening control on our northern boundary.

In a joint promotion in April, with the Forestry England at Grizedale Visitor

Centre, we introduced eye-catching information panels and a family-friendly leaflet and red squirrel fact sheet. The leaflets and fact sheets were very well received and are now used by other major landowners and visitor outlets. We also supported the Brantwood World Animal Day event and had our stand at the Rusland Annual Show.

Fundraising has continued to be successful, with generous donations from Logs Direct, the John Strutt Conservation Foundation, Graythwaite Estate, Lake District National Park Authority and Forestry England. We thank them all.

Within the Rusland Valley is Hay Bridge Nature Reserve. It is owned by the John Strutt Conservation Foundation, who manage the land to maintain and enhance its diverse range of habitats. These include woodland, pasture, open tarn, fen, raised bog, riverbank, and fell. The resident warden is a keen advocate in helping the cause of the Red Squirrel and is active in the culling of Grey Squirrels.

So overall a successful 2019, but with more work to do to build on the fantastic start given by the Rusland Horizon's scheme.



## Coniston & Torver

Whilst we only have a few people actively tackling the greys in this area we were delighted when we had the sighting of a Red Squirrel in Coniston. The home owner has shown our area coordinator the footage of a Red enjoying their garden which was a delight to see.

In Torver, we have yet to see Reds but we are hopeful that the populations from the Broughton area may

move up as we have had a good clearance of Greys at that end of the village.

We were very pleased to accept a £100 donation towards our cause in Torver and Coniston from the Torver Country Fair committee.







## Arnside & Silverdale

Our coordinators and volunteers have been working hard in this area. There are around 55 volunteers mostly trapping and shooting within their own gardens. There are also 3 part time Squirrel Rangers, a high proportion of their work is paid for by landowners.

After a great deal of work over the last 5 years, we have successfully controlled Greys within the AONB but are not able to clear them over the whole AONB because of lack of resources. We are also unlikely to have Red incursions from the north, sufficient to establish a breeding colony within the AONB naturally anytime soon.

The plan is to concentrate our efforts to clear Greys from a defendable area to prove we can do so and to create an area where Reds could be reintroduced. This could be done while following the guidance within the UK Squirrel Accord's new

protocols for reintroductions. The area to the South West of Arnside was the most obvious area since it was protected from Grey re-incursions by the sea, Arnside Tower Farm valley pasture, and the treeless marsh land areas to the North East. It represents 270 ha of contiguous woodland, well above the 200ha recommended by the UK Squirrel Accord. We could also count on the cooperation of all the landowners within the area. We have chosen to call this area the "Arnside Peninsula".

Controlling Greys elsewhere in the AONB will continue. This is because Greys generally look for new territories when they are under population pressure. The other reason is, if we continue to control Greys across the whole AONB then in the course of time Reds could move from the Peninsula to other areas of the AONB as their population grows.

We are hoping to develop links with Cumbria University who are keen to do monitoring work for us on Grey

population densities particularly evidencing the declines as we steadily clear the area of the peninsula. We have yet to work out the precise methodology but would use hair tubes to check for Grey hairs to detect presence or otherwise. They also have GPS collars to track movement of Reds once they are released. Dr Claire Holt has joined our Steering Group from the University. She has considerable prior experience with squirrels so her support will be invaluable.

We continue to live 'hand to mouth' with great reliance on a small number of benefactors and uncertain grant applications.

We need to identify new sources of funding – and new volunteers to help secure it. Any offers of help/donations are welcome. We also need a fund raiser who would, in particular, look for donations over say 5 years so that we have longer term funding security maybe from our local businesses who would benefit from the extra footfall that a Red Sanctuary might bring.

## Looking forward

2020, this is certainly going to be a year of ups and downs given that there is still huge uncertainty regarding the likely environmental implications of Brexit, with many complex issues yet to be resolved. It is far too early to say whether Brexit will end up being good or bad for nature in the UK. The Secretary of State's pledge to put the 'environment first' in future policy is an important statement of intent.

If you zoom in from the big picture, here in our area there are inspiring stories of regeneration and positive change, with nature making a difference in people's lives, and people valuing and nurturing their natural environment. These stories are the key to securing our area's future; we need to learn from them, replicate them and thereby build our area into one which nature and people coexist.

We're so often flooded with bad news of environmental catastrophe that we can feel paralyzed but I am heartened by the sheer amount of people who on a local scale are actively involved in conservation projects, especially regarding Red Squirrels.

Bringing these amazing people together in a network will do so much – and already has done so much – for squirrels everywhere.

A Big THANK YOU to everyone who has sent in sightings of red or grey squirrels. The information is invaluable as we try to document the natural expansion of the areas red squirrel population and attempt to remove grey squirrels.

We are also especially interested if red squirrels are visiting gardens or bird tables and for copies of any pictures which we can put on Twitter or Facebook.



## Westmorland Red Squirrels

Our thanks to **Cumbria Wildlife Trust** for printing this Annual Review and to **Neil McIntyre** for the use of his images:

[www.neilmcintyre.com](http://www.neilmcintyre.com)

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or by email to: [sightings@westmorlandredsquirrels.org.uk](mailto:sightings@westmorlandredsquirrels.org.uk)  
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